



CHOOSING THE PATRIARCH

LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF OUR GLORIOUS CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

These days, in every Divine Liturgy, we ask God to “remember the soul of the Thrice-Blessed Pope Abba Shenouda III. Graciously, O Lord, repose his soul in the bosom of our Holy Fathers and grant us a righteous shepherd who will shepherd Your people in purity and righteousness.” While praying, we must also take heed of the Canons, the Holy Tradition, and the history of the Church in choosing the person who will sit on the See of St. Mark. I wish to present some lessons from the history of our glorious Church in choosing the Patriarch, and specifically, choosing the Patriarch from among the diocesan metropolitans and bishops. I present this research with the prayer and wish that God may lead us to remain faithful to the Holy Canons and Tradition established in the Church.

When we consider the history of choosing the Patriarch in our Church, we find diversity in the ways in which he was chosen. In some instances, a Patriarch chose his successor while in others there was a consensus between the bishops and laity concerning a specific person. In yet other instances, the Patriarch was chosen by an election that was followed by an altar lot. The Patriarch was also chosen from men of different vocations. The Church chose men who were professors of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, monks, and even laymen. **Despite this diversity, the obvious truth is that the Church never chose a patriarch from the diocesan metropolitans and bishops except during a very short and recent time period that did not exceed 30 years between 1928-1956.** The Patriarchs during that time were His Holiness Pope Youannes XIX (1928-42), the 113th Patriarch; His Holiness Pope Macarius III (1944-45), the 114th Patriarch; and His Holiness Pope Yusab II (1946-56), the 115th Patriarch.

THE IDEA OF CHOOSING THE PATRIARCH FROM THE DIOCESAN METROPOLITANS AND BISHOPS

Despite the richness of our Church with respect to the blessed metropolitans and bishops throughout history, and their uniqueness in holiness, knowledge and success in the pastoral work within their dioceses — bishops such as St. Serapion of Thmuis who lived during the era of St. Athanasius, Bishop Yusab of Girga and Akhmim (d. 1826) who lived during the era of Pope Markos VIII, the 108th Patriarch (1796-1809) and Pope Botros El Gawly, the 109th Patriarch (1810-1852), and Bishop Sarapamon Abu' Tarha who also lived during the era of Pope Botros El Gawly, and others — the Church never thought of choosing the Patriarch from the diocesan metropolitans and bishops, but rather preferred to choose the Patriarch from among the laymen before the diocesan metropolitans. There were 26 patriarchs chosen from the laymen, among them Pope Abraam Ibn Zera'a who presided over the miraculous relocation of the Muqattam Mountain.

WHEN DID THE IDEA OF CHOOSING THE PATRIARCH FROM THE DIOCESAN METROPOLITANS AND BISHOPS BEGIN?

I. Pope Mikhail (Khail) I, the 46th Patriarch (744-767)

This saint survived a difficult era of persecution in the history of the Church, which saw the end of the Ummayyad and the beginning of the Abbasid dynasties. He suffered tremendous persecutions from ruthless governors and was thrown in jail several times. Nonetheless, he stood firm and courageous in defending the Orthodox faith and shepherding his people with dedication, purity, and righteousness. We may read the whole history of this saint in Volume II of Iris Habib El Masry's *The Story of the Copts*. Before the end of that era, a crucially important incident occurred that immortalized the name of Pope Mikhail I in the history of the Church with fame and glory.

The See of Antioch stayed vacant for a while because of the political incidents that accompanied the end of the Umayyad and the beginning of the Abbasid dynasties. It happened that Bishop Isaac of Harran desired to become the Patriarch of Antioch. Since he had an intimate relationship with Caliph Abdullah Abu Gaafar of Harran, Bishop Isaac sought his assistance to help him achieve his goal. However, two Antiochian bishops opposed Bishop Isaac's wish while reminding him of the Church canons which forbid a diocesan bishop to move to the See of the Patriarch or to seek the assistance of the authorities to acquire a priestly rank. Caliph Abdullah was

incensed at the two bishops and murdered them while helping Bishop Isaac sit on the See of Antioch. Wanting to confirm his situation, Bishop Isaac sent a delegation of bishops carrying a Letter of Communion along with both gifts and threats to Pope Mikhail I of Alexandria, who refused to accept Bishop Isaac as the Patriarch of Antioch. Pope Mikhail was summoned by Abdullah in light of the close political relationship between Egypt and Syria at the time. When Bishop Isaac's messengers reached al-Fistat, they met with the governor of Egypt and informed him about their mission. The governor begged Pope Mikhail to accept the delegation and the Letter of Communion out of fear that Abdullah would harm him. Pope Mikhail asked the governor to give him three days to convene a synod of bishops to discuss the matter and the governor agreed. The synod gathered for an entire month without any interruption from the governor; he did not even remind Pope Mikhail that they had initially agreed on three days only.

After that month passed, the bishops held a meeting at the Church of St. Mary known as El Mu'allaqah (the "Hanging Church") where Pope Mikhail issued the following decision of the Holy Synod concerning Bishop Isaac's request:

No sword, fire, throwing to the lions or banishment, or all of those things together can scare me. And I will not accept an illegal act. I will not put myself under my anathema which I wrote with my own hand writing and in which I declared that it is not permissible for a bishop to be a patriarch. Our honored fathers considered those who receive the priesthood from authorities are anathema. For the bishops had written to me from Antioch during the days of Yohanna the Patriarch that all the bishops who after him to sit on the throne of the Patriarchate to be anathema. So how am I supposed to accept what I had refused before? And our honored fathers themselves had declared that all who conduct that behavior to be anathema.

Pope Mikhail handed this decision to the bishops sent by Bishop Isaac.

The delegation returned to the governor of Egypt and requested that he command Pope Mikhail to accompany them to Harran. The governor, who cared for Pope Mikhail, again begged him to yield to Caliph Abdullah and Bishop Isaac, but Pope Mikhail thanked him and refused to change his declaration. He told the governor that he was ready to go to Harran. Two other Alexandrian bishops, Abba Moses and Abba Theodosius, both declared that they were ready to accompany Pope Mikhail in his journey to Harran. After the honorable Pope made preparations for his journey, a messenger arrived in al-Fistat declaring the death of Bishop Isaac. When the delegation of bishops heard this, they returned to their country immediately in silence. As for Pope Mikhail and the bishops of Egypt, they thanked God for His support.

We learn from this story the following points:

1. Pope Mikhail I lived a holy life full of courage in front of unjust rulers, like Abdullah, and possessed amazing endurance that helped him preserve the Canons of the Church despite being jailed several times.
2. The declaration issued by Pope Mikhail was not his own personal opinion only, but rather, the result of a Holy Synod of bishops who gathered for a whole month to research the Canons of the Holy Church. In addition, two of these bishops were ready to die with Pope Mikhail in Harran for the sake of defending the Canons.
3. The Canons of the Holy Church forbid a bishop to move from one diocese to another, or to receive the priesthood from the hands of worldly authorities. These Canons are not local canons belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church only, but rather, are universal Canons belonging to the whole Church. As the declaration of the Holy Synod mentioned, the bishops of Antioch wrote to Pope Mikhail during the days of Patriarch Yohanna and said, “Those who may follow him (Patriarch Yohanna) from the metropolitans as Patriarch will be anathema.” Pope Mikhail agreed and signed this declaration with the bishops of Antioch. This is why Pope Mikhail asked, “How can I justify today what I banned yesterday?”

Thus, the anathemas of Pope Mikhail I were not personal ones, but rather, were issued from the Synods of the Church of Antioch and the Church of Alexandria. Two Antiochian bishops were martyred by Caliph Abdullah when they refused to agree to the transfer of Bishop Isaac to the See of Antiochian. In addition, the Pope of Alexandria and two of his bishops were also prepared to become martyrs for the same reason. The declaration of Pope Mikhail became an important historical document in the history of the Church; so much so that it is called the Canon of Pope Mikhail. Our glorious Church applied that Canon until the nineteenth century when the idea of moving a metropolitan or diocesan bishop manifested itself again.

2. THE DECREE OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF 1873

After the departure of Pope Demetrius II, the 111th Patriarch of Alexandria (1862-1870), the ordination of the new patriarch was disrupted because of a myth that the khedive¹ would die if a new patriarch was ordained. Khedive Ismail disrupted the process for fear that he would die if a new patriarch was ordained. In

¹ The khedive was the viceroy of Egypt under Ottoman rule.

response, the bishops and laity of the Coptic Church appointed Metropolitan Morkos of El Beheira as the *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark to manage the Church's affairs. After two years without a patriarch, the King of Ethiopia sent a letter to Khedive Ismail demanding the ordination of a new patriarch. Wahba Bik Rizkallah, the vizier of the Ministry of Finance, agreed with the Khedive to ordain Metropolitan Morkos as the Patriarch. He reasoned with the Khedive that Metropolitan Morkos had managed the Church for two years without any incident or any harm to the Khedive as predicted by the myth. The Khedive liked the idea, which was also accepted by Metropolitan Morkos. Wahba Bik then attempted to collect signatures from the Coptic elite to elevate Metropolitan Morkos as the Patriarch of the See of St. Mark. Using his influence, Wahba was able to force many to sign, but a good number refused to sign, because they saw this action as being against the Holy Canons of the Church. A division thus developed in the Church.

When Metropolitan Basilios of Jerusalem arrived in Egypt and reviewed the situation, he refused to accept the promotion of Metropolitan Morkos and asked to convene the Holy Synod to discuss the matter. The Holy Synod met in the year 1873 and, after discussing the matter, reached a declaration: "We do not approve or permit the priests or the people of the See of St. Mark to absolve or trespass the paternal limits. Anyone who seeks the rank of patriarch from the diocesan metropolitans and bishops, or sought to get it, accepted it, or anyone who sought to get it for him whether he was a priest, high priest, or layman is anathema." The Holy Synod then presented extensive research on the relevant passages from the Holy Scripture and the Holy Canons, the rite and history of the Coptic Church, and the history of other churches, like the Antiochian Church, to demonstrate the non-canoncity and illegality of choosing a patriarch from among the diocesan metropolitans and bishops.

We thank God that the text of this decision still exists — it is attached with that historical research — but I am nonetheless going to present a summary of the reasons on which the fathers based their decision, for the decision was not a hasty one, but rather, was based on an extensive study. The bishops did not, as some people might argue, rely on an inaccurate translation of the Canons of the Holy Apostles. Rather, they depended on different principles and reasons on which the fathers elaborated.

1. In the Introduction to their decision, the fathers explained the reasons which led them to convene and take their decision as mentioned above in the summary of the historical background.

2. The fathers confirmed that their target was not just opposing those who wanted to ordain Metropolitan Morkos and that their decision was not specifically against the metropolitan whom they called, “The honored metropolitan, our brother and our partner in the Apostolic ministry.” Instead, they confirmed that their goal was to defend and protect the Canons of the Holy Church and Her teachings, because their duty as bishops was to oppose anything they saw as contrary to the Canons of the Holy Church. They asked the people to be united under the Holy Canons and rites of the Church.
3. The fathers of the Holy Synod of 1873 presented five main reasons for their decision:
 1. The teachings of the Holy Church state that one of the important conditions for a candidate being considered for the rank of patriarch was that he should be “a monk, or one possessing one of the ranks of the Holy Altar, or a layman, but they do not indicate that the candidate could be a diocesan metropolitan or a bishop.” They supported their decision by referring to the Holy Canons, which outline the qualifications for nominees to the rank of patriarch. They also stated that the candidate should be ordained a patriarch from a lower rank as opposed to a bishop transferring from another diocese:

It is useful to indicate from the text that our Church never approved electing a bishop or metropolitan to be a patriarch. Instead, the Patriarch came from the rank of hegumen and below. If it was permissible for a diocesan metropolitan or bishop to become patriarch, the text would have indicated so. Instead, the text stops at the rank of hegumen and states that if there is no priest, deacon or monk as a suitable candidate, the Patriarch may be chosen from among the laymen. If diocesan metropolitans and bishops were permitted to become the Patriarch, there would be no need to accept laymen. If these teachings constitute the Holy Tradition of the Church, is it justifiable now to violate them?

2. The fathers of the Holy Synod reviewed the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church from the time of St. Mark to the time of Pope Demetrius II and found that no diocesan metropolitan or bishop was nominated for the See of St. Mark, but instead, all of the Patriarchs were hegumens, priests, deacons, simple monks and virgin laymen. Then the fathers of the Holy Synod added

It is not reasonable to say that this status quo was pointless, by accident, or without intention. If our Church permitted moving bishops from their dioceses to the See of St. Mark when it was hard to find the suitable one among the monks or the celibates of the Coptic people, She would not have chosen Syrian people as Pope

Simon, the 42nd Patriarch of Alexandria, and Pope Abraam, the 62nd Patriarch of Alexandria, and the other Syrians who were chosen to sit on the See of St. Mark. They would have chosen from those who were elected of its best bishops or metropolitans who were deserving that rank rather than choosing foreigners to be nominated, or the Church would have permitted the transfer of the diocesan metropolitans or bishops to the patriarchate...

Now we cannot justify breaking that rule (regarding the non-canonicity of transferring the diocesan metropolitans or bishops to the patriarchate) after nineteen generations of Christianity, particularly since the Holy Scripture teaches us to “Remember the days of old, consider the years for past ages: ask thy father, and he shall relate to thee, thine elders, and they shall tell thee” (Deut. 32:7 LXX).

3. The fathers of the Holy Synod confirmed that the Canon which the Church had followed from the time of St. Mark until Pope Demetrius — which stated that the metropolitans and bishops were not to be moved from their dioceses to the patriarchate — was based on the Holy Canon which states, “The bishop is not to be moved from his town or village on which he was ordained to another for any reason like drought, being in a small town, having few people, or having insufficient revenue. And he was not allowed to ask for a better one, for everyone had his share from God.” Indeed that text summarized several Canons, which prohibit the transfer of a metropolitan or bishop to another diocese.² The fathers of the Holy Synod added,

That case, as we have previously said, is like the marriage case: Any man who divorces his wife commits adultery; it is immoral because he wants to replace her with a better one. It is the same with the bishops and priests who want places better than theirs. For that reason we have to stop them.

4. The fathers referred to the anathema of Pope Mikhail I and expressed their agreement with it after setting forth the entire story. They also agreed on the anathema that the Holy Synod issued under Pope Mikhail, which prohibited two things. First, it prohibited the appointment of a diocesan metropolitan or bishop as a patriarch. Second, it prohibited persons from receiving the priesthood by the help of the worldly authorities, as in the case of Bishop Isaac who tried to become the Patriarch of Antioch with the help of Caliph Abdullah. They recounted how this story led to the martyrdom of the two

² See *A Statement from the Clergy Synod of the Diocese of Los Angeles Regarding the Non-Canonical Action of Choosing the Patriarch from among the Diocesan Bishops*, which is available at www.lacopts.org, for a summary of these canons.

righteous Antiochian bishops who refused to consent to this non-canonical and illegal action. They further recounted how Bishop Isaac died on the third day after his non-canonical ordination and how, on the same day, another bishop named Athanasius tried to secure the See of Antioch for himself. He also died three days later. After Athanasius died, another man named Girga stepped in and stole the See of Antioch until he was arrested at the request of another Antiochian bishop. In commenting on these unfortunate incidents, the fathers of the Holy Synod said,

Consider how these bishops, when they left their dioceses and took the rank of patriarch, brought about the martyrdom of two righteous bishops, the death of Bishop Isaac and Bishop Athanasius on the third day after their non-canonical ordinations, and the jailing of the pretender Patriarch Girga. All of this happened because the metropolitans and bishops advanced to the rank of patriarch. May God have mercy on our fathers who prevented these unfortunate incidents as they protected the See of St. Mark.

5. The fathers of the Holy Synod confirmed that there are legal terms that must be respected and kept by the existing metropolitans and bishops. It is important to note that if anyone has a legal challenge to present against a candidate, we as bishops have to consider it, and if a person's candidacy is illegal, we must terminate it, for it is our role to protect the legality of the nomination of the Patriarch. How is it possible for us as metropolitans and bishops to agree on something that the Church has never accepted or permitted? How could this happen while we are responsible in front of God to protect the foundation of our Church?

From this brief summary of the reasons for the convening of the 1873 Holy Synod and the resulting decision, we learn the following:

1. When the Church found that the people were divided between two opinions, the Holy Synod convened to research the matter and issue a clear and pronounced decision supported by convincing evidence without any compliments or acclamations for a specific person. The fathers of the Holy Synod did not flatter Metropolitan Morkos, nor did they fear the authority of the Khedive or Wahba Bik. Instead, they studied the matter exhaustively and issued their decision without attacking or doubting the intention of anyone; they were objective in their decision. For this reason, they were able to unite the people and remove any dispute. Even Metropolitan Morkos, the *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark, signed the declaration with the holy fathers of 1873.

2. When the Holy Synod preserved the Holy Canons and Tradition in choosing the Patriarch, the great result was the papacy of Pope Kyrillos V whose era was a great renaissance for the Coptic Church. That era began during the time of the patriarchs who came before him — Pope Mark VIII, Pope Botros El Gawly, Pope Kyrillos IV, and Pope Demetrius II. It was an era of renaissance that lasted 132 years despite all of the incidents that occurred during this time, such as the French campaign, the rule of Mohammed Ali, the revolution of Urabi, the British occupation of Egypt, the revolution of 1919, and finally, the independence of Egypt from British protection. We compare all of this with what happened in 1928 when the Holy Synod broke the Holy Tradition and permitted diocesan metropolitans and bishops to become patriarchs. From that decision, the Church began to enter into the shadows and continued falling until 1959 when She returned to the Holy Tradition and chose Hegumen Mina the Solitary as Pope Kyrillos VI. The golden era ushered in with the ordination of Pope Kyrillos VI continues to the present day as the Church has benefited from two of the greatest popes in Her history, Pope Kyrillos VI and Pope Shenouda III.

Now, we are standing before a crossroads at which we have to choose either continuing this golden era or leading the Church to a new fall if we do not follow the Holy Canons.

THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR CHURCH IN CHOOSING A PATRIARCH FROM THE DIOCESAN METROPOLITANS OR BISHOPS

1. The Year 1928

The year 1928 was a critical year in the history of the See of St. Mark. In December 1928, the first diocesan metropolitan was appointed as patriarch, Pope John XIX, the 111th Patriarch (1928-1942). We shall now deal with the historical background and incidents that led to the deviation from the Holy Canons that the Coptic Church preserved from the time of St. Mark.

The See of St. Mark became vacant after the death of Pope Kyrillos V on August 7, 1927. Pope Kyrillos had led the church for almost 53 years from 1874-1927 until he reached the age of 96, the longest papacy in the history of the Coptic Church. During his papacy, the Church witnessed a great renaissance and the See of St. Mark reached new heights on both a national and international level. During this time, Egypt passed through many events, such as the revolution of Urabi, British occupation, World War I, the revolution of 1919, and Egypt's declaration of

independence in 1922 before Fouad was crowned the first king of Egypt. During all of this events, Pope Kyrillos V led the Church with great wisdom and established the patriotic role of the Church in supporting the independence of the country. He had great relationships with the leaders of the nationalist movement, especially with its leader, Saad Zaghloul. When both Pope Kyrillos V and Saad Zaghloul passed away in August 1927, there were two primary strands in the Egyptian society: the nationalist strand led by the Wafd party, which the Copts joined and the Church supported. Pope Kyrillos V had supported this party along with his closest metropolitan and helper, Metropolitan Youannes of El Beheira and Monofiya, who was also the patriarchal vicar at Alexandria. He had honorable patriotic accomplishments in addition to his ecclesiastical honors, which won him the confidence of Pope Kyrillos V, the other bishops, and the Coptic people at large. He was also well respected by the leaders of the nationalist movement. In addition to the nationalist strand in Egyptian society, there was another strand that favored cooperation with the British occupiers to renew Egypt. There were some in the Church who cultivated friendships with people in the Anglican Church which followed a policy of maintaining a friendly relationship with the Coptic Church.

After the departure of Pope Kyrillos V on August 7, 1927, the Holy Synod and Coptic Lay Council (Majlis al-Milli) agreed on choosing Metropolitan Youanes as the *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark. This agreement was received well not only by Copts, but by all Egyptians in light of his many qualifications, his patriotism, and his unwavering love and loyalty to Pope Kyrillos V. In addition, he was the eldest bishop and the Secretary of the Coptic Lay Council.

The Church began to search for the successor to Pope Kyrillos V by examining the monks as it had done throughout history. Attention was initially directed to Fr. Hananiah El Antony and Archdeacon Habib Girgis, who was the private deacon of Pope Kyrillos V. However, as the number of Coptic elite joining the nationalist political movement grew, consensus among them rested on Metropolitan Youannes. The opposing political strand, which favored cooperation with the British to achieve progress in Egypt set forth Hegumen Youhanna Salama El Muharraqi as their candidate. He was the patriarchal vicar of the Diocese of Khartoum and the author of the famous book, *The Precious Pearls in Explaining the Church Rites and Creed*. Hegumen Youhanna was married in his youth and lived with his wife a short time before she passed away. After that, he entered into the Monastery of St. Mary known as El Muharraq and became a monk for several years before he was chosen to be the patriarchal vicar of the Diocese of Khartoum.

Those who opposed Hegumen Youhanna began their campaigns against him and accused him of having good relations with the British. The accusations reached King Fouad who summoned Tewfik Dous, the Minister of Transportation, to clarify the matter. The minister told the king, "You know, my lord, that the opposition knows no self-control and that the Coptic popes have been loyal to their nation throughout the generations." The king answered, "We are now in a critical situation with the British. There is no need to elect a patriarch, because the election might result in a pope who is sympathetic to the British. I personally know Metropolitan Youannes is a good choice." Tewfik protested and said, "The Holy Canons of the Coptic Church do not permit a metropolitan to ascend to the See of St. Mark." The king, however, insisted, and Tewfik agreed to make arrangements to achieve the king's desire.

On the morning of Thursday, July 18, 1928, the Holy Synod was summoned to the patriarchate by Metropolitan Youannes. Eleven metropolitans were in attendance, including Abba Macarius of Assiut, Abba Yusab of Girga, Abba Lukas of Qena and Qus, Abba Sarapamon of Nubia and the Sudan, Abba Theophilus of Manfalout and Abanoub, Abba Athanasius of Beni Suef and Bahnesa, Abba Mikhail of Abotij and Tahta, Abba Basilius of Jerusalem, Abba Botros of Dakhalia, Gharbia, and Damietta, Abba Isaac of Fayoum, and Abba Mettaous of Giza, Qliubiya and Qesna. In addition, the following hegumens were summoned, as well: Hegumen Sarapamon, the abbot of El Baramous Monastery; Hegumen Maximus, the abbot of the Syrian Monastery; and Hegumen Youhanna, the abbot of the Monastery of Abba Pishoy. After prayers and discussions, they declared as follows:

1. It was mentioned in Magmou'a Al Safawi, p. 47 in the chapter on bishops, concerning the Council of Nicæa, "If the bishop has a problem that may cause him to leave his diocese, and there is no way for him to return, he is excused and can be directed to another diocese if he is chaste and possesses a good command of faith. If he is deserving, he may move to a better place, for he is not seeking it and should not be blamed for that.
2. Pope Botros El Gawly, the 109th Patriarch, was appointed a metropolitan of Ethiopia. When the Alexandrian See became vacant, he was chosen and elevated to the rank of patriarch.
3. Pope Kyrillos IV, the 110th Patriarch, was ordained a metropolitan for Cairo and a vice-patriarch. One year and two months after his ordination, he was promoted to the patriarchate.
4. All traditional churches elect the Patriarch from the bishops.

We observe the following concerning the Holy Synod of 1928:

1. The Holy Synod of 1928 was held because of special circumstances, in particular, the wish of King Fouad to appoint Metropolitan Youannes as patriarch as a result of his patriotism and to ensure that no British sympathizers would become the Pope of Alexandria. The members of the Holy Synod responded to the king's wish and wanted to provide some ecclesiastical justification to support him. Members of the Coptic Lay Council also reacted to the king's wish by ceding the rules of electing the Patriarch to the Egyptian government. They wanted to give the king the power to enact laws and regulations that would allow Metropolitan Youannes to be elected patriarch. King Fouad issued a royal decree that stipulated the rules for the election of the Patriarch. Not only that, but he issued another decree that specified exactly the names of the people who could vote for the new patriarch.
2. The members of the Holy Synod were under pressure to fulfill the king's desire, so they agreed with the Coptic Lay Council in allowing the government to handle the legal aspects of electing the new patriarch. They focused only on the ecclesiastical aspects. For this reason, the decision of this Holy Synod contains no reference to any law or regulation concerning the election of the new patriarch.
3. The Holy Synod depended on the text of a canon mistakenly identified as a canon of the Council of Nicæa, which was actually a different Arabic translation of Canon 14 of the Holy Apostles, which provides a limited exception for the transfer of bishops from one diocese to another. We notice that the text of the fathers of the Holy Synod of 1928 spoke about what happened in the case a bishop was *forced* to leave his diocese for reasons beyond his control and had no place to go. The quoted canon grants an exception to such a bishop to transfer to another diocese, provided he was a man of chastity and good conduct. This is why the canon states, "He should not be blamed for that," which refers to the fact that he had to be blameless in the circumstances that forced him to leave his diocese. He was permitted to transfer to a better diocese, because it was not his desire to leave in the first place, but rather, he was forced to leave through no fault of his own. This canon referenced by the Holy Synod of 1928 clearly was not applicable to the case of Metropolitan Youannes, because he was not forced to leave his diocese through no fault of his own. In fact, when he was appointed as *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark, he did not leave the diocese of El Beheira and Monofia, but instead, was given the responsibility of acting patriarch in addition to his existing responsibilities as the metropolitan of that diocese.

It is clear that the rushed nature of the meeting of the fathers in 1928 led to many errors, foremost among them the fact that the canon they referenced had no applicability to the case of Metropolitan Youannes. In fact, when Metropolitan Youannes gained the rank of patriarch, the fathers of the Holy Synod did not know what to do, because it was a new situation in the history of the Church. At no point before this was a diocesan metropolitan elevated to the rank of patriarch. As a result, the fathers fell into a great ecclesiastical error when they laid their hands on him and ordained him a patriarch even though he was already ordained as a bishop. Generally speaking, a man is ordained to a particular rank (i.e., deacon, priest, bishop) only once. Any higher position within the same rank (i.e., archdeacon, hegumen, metropolitan) is an elevation, not another ordination. However, in the case of Metropolitan Youannes, he was ordained as a bishop two times because the fathers of the Holy Synod were confused and followed the established rite of ordaining the Patriarch from among the monks.

4. The fathers of the Holy Synod of 1928 mentioned two examples of diocesan metropolitans that were later ordained patriarchs, Pope Botros El Gawly and Pope Kyrillos IV. However, it is not true that these two were diocesan metropolitans before become patriarch as can be seen from the following history:
 - a. In the case of Pope Peter, his biography states that Pope Mark VIII brought him from the monastery to be ordained as a metropolitan for Ethiopia, but the ordination was postponed. The Pope took him as a personal secretary and later ordained another monk as Metropolitan Macarius for Ethiopia. As for Hegumen Mercurious El Gawly, he was ordained as a general bishop by the name of Bishop Theophilus to assist the Patriarch. He remained in this capacity for six months. Later, after Pope Mark VIII departed on December 21, 1809, the Holy Synod met with the elite of the Coptic laity and agreed on choosing Bishop Theophilus as patriarch with the name Pope Botros El Gawly on December 24, 1809, the third day after the departure of Pope Mark VIII.
 - b. In the case of Pope Kyrillos IV, he was nominated for the patriarchate after the death of Pope Botros El Gawly. A recommendation was presented to ordain Hegumen Dawood (his name before ordination as patriarch) as the Patriarch of the See of St. Mark. The recommendation was signed by the members of the Holy Synod. However, certain astrologers claimed that electing a new patriarch would be a misfortune for the Khedive. As a result, the Copts agreed on

ordained Hegumen Dawood as a general metropolitan with the name Metropolitan Kyrillos for the denomination of the Coptic people. Metropolitan Kyrillos managed the church affairs as a general bishop. Two years later, he was ordained as Pope Kyrillos IV.

- c. Thus, in these two cases, Pope Botros El Gawly and Pope Kyrillos IV, it is clear that they were never diocesan metropolitans, but rather, each was a general bishop before becoming patriarch.
5. When the Holy Synod stated that all traditional churches elect the Patriarch from among the diocesan bishops, they forgot what happened in the eight century in the case of Bishop Isaac of Harran and the See of Antioch, which, as we have mentioned, led the martyrdom of two righteous Antiochian bishops and the staunch refusal of the Coptic Church to accept such an action. For Pope Mikhail, the matter depended on the refusal of the bishops of Antioch who wrote to him during the era of Patriarch Youhanna El Antaky and said that any of the diocesan bishops who became patriarch would be anathema.

The tradition of the ancient churches, like the Church of Alexandria and the Church of Antioch, banned diocesan metropolitans and bishops from becoming patriarch. Any such case now is a breaking of the Holy Tradition.

6. The fathers of the Holy Synod of 1928 did not discuss the canon of Pope Mikhail I and the decision of the Holy Synod of 1873. Nor did they provide answers to the principles set forth in those decisions. In addition, they did not give a clear explanation as to why they broke the Holy Tradition of the Church, which lasted for twenty centuries and was staunchly defended by the Fathers of the Church. As we have seen, people died to defend the Tradition and anathemas were issued for anyone that opposed the Tradition, which is supported by the Holy Canons of the Apostles, the Ecumenical Councils, and the local councils throughout the history of the Church.

The only excuse for the fathers of the Holy Synod of 1928 is that they did not gather to discuss the legality of having the diocesan metropolitans and bishops elected as patriarch, but rather, met simply to find ecclesiastical cover to fulfill King Fouad's wish. For this reason, it is important to read the decisions of the Holy Synod in the context of the circumstances in which it was convened, for we cannot assume that the decisions of the 1928 Holy Synod cancel the decisions of the prior Holy Synods because they simply did not

provide a strong, legally sound and researched position when compared to the fathers of the Holy Synod held by Pope Khail, who were ready to die defending the Church laws, or when compared to the fathers of the 1873 Holy Synod, who presented strong legal research that was supported by the Holy Scripture, church canon law and church history.

Let us follow the incidents after the decision of the 1928 Holy Synod. The Coptic Lay Council held a meeting and postponed the signing of the nomination and the election of the Patriarch, asking the government to take into consideration the ecclesiastical law, its tradition and the people's wishes. Thus, the Holy Synod and Lay Council left the process of electing the Patriarch and regulating the election process to the government, which gave King Fouad the opportunity to organize the whole process and to fulfill his wish in appointing Metropolitan Youannes as Patriarch.

On December 1, 1928 King Fouad issued Royal Decree No. 84 for the year 1928, which provided as follows:³ "We, Fouad the First, the King of Egypt: After reviewing our orders issued on December 16, 1927 and June 18, August 16, and September 15, 1928, to appoint a *locum tenens* for the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, and because it is important to expedite the election of the Patriarch without waiting for the previously indicated process with respect to nominating and electing the Patriarch, we order the following:

Article No. 1: A committee that contains the following members is to elect the Patriarch:

First: All the metropolitans, bishops and the abbots of the monasteries.

Second: The members of the Coptic Lay Council.

Third: The members of the denomination with the following names (they were 48 persons).

Article No. 2: The election of the Patriarch will be held on Friday, December 7, 1928, commencing nine o'clock in the morning at the patriarchate.

Article No. 3: The society is to be headed by the *locum tenens*, or the eldest metropolitan, and a committee of four voters who will assist in the election process; two of them will be chosen by the priests from the committee and

³ Review the complete text of the royal decree text as it was published in the *Karma* magazine in 1929

two will be chosen by the other members during the opening of the session. This committee will write a report detailing what is happening.

Article No. 4: The elections are through secret voting, and it is forbidden for the voter to vote for more than one candidate.

Article No. 5: The society's meeting cannot be legal unless it is attended by more than half the voters. If that number is not available, the election is to be postponed to Monday December 10, 1928 and the meeting is legal if any number of the voters attend.

Article No. 6: The winner is considered legally winning if he receives the absolute majority for the voting. If no one gets an absolute majority, the election is to be repeated after a week the same way the previous one was organized and as it is stated in the third and fourth articles. If the votes are equal between two or more of the nominees, a toss is done. After counting the votes by the committee mentioned in the third article, the head of the society announces the results for the voters and writes a report.

Article No. 7: By the end of the elections, the result is to be announced accompanied by a report, and a copy is to be signed like the original one and delivered to the government to issue a royal order to appoint the Patriarch.

Article No. 8: The prime minister must enforce our order and work on it from the date of issuing it in the formal magazine.

Issued at the Montazah Palace, 16 Gomady, the second year 1347 Hegria (December 1, 1928)

Fouad the First
King of Egypt

The Royal Order limited the right to vote to only 96 persons of which 85 attended the elections. The election was held and Metropolitan Youannes received 70 votes while Hegumen Youhanna Salama received 9. Hegumen Hananiah El Antony and Archdeacon Habib Girgis received 2 votes each while the Metropolitan of Sohag received 1 vote and another vote was blank. The election was held on December 7, 1928, a week from the issuance of the Royal Order, and the result was immediately reported to the royal palace. A royal order to appoint Metropolitan Youannes, the Metropolitan of El Beheira and Monofia, and the *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark

as the Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church was issued on the same day and he was ordained on December 16, 1928.

We may notice the following:

1. The decision of the Holy Synod was issued in a rush on July 18, 1928 and ratified by the Lay Council. Immediately thereafter, a royal decree containing the regulations for electing the Patriarch was issued on December 1. The election was held on December 7 and the royal order appointing Metropolitan Youannes was issued on the same day. Nine days later, he was ordained as the Patriarch.
2. The royal order mentioned the rush factor, saying, "It is important to expedite the election of the Patriarch without waiting for the previously indicated process with respect to nominating and electing the Patriarch."
3. The Holy Synod and Lay Council both gave up their rights in setting forth the laws and rules concerning the election of the Patriarch and authorized the king and his government to do so. This was a dangerous precedent for the Church, which was represented by Her Holy Synod and the Lay Council.
4. The king and his government used the Church's surrender of Her power to set forth detailed laws that responded to the king's wish. Even though the royal order stated that the voters would be from within the Church, it nonetheless specified the names of certain people who were allowed to vote. It was not a secret as to why the government wanted to specify only certain people to vote in the election. This was another dangerous precedent.
5. The royal order did not deal with the names of candidates for the rank of patriarch, because it did not appoint any committee to receive nominations or objections related to candidates, but left the whole matter to the voters to choose anyone. Of course, they had to choose no more than one. For this reason, there was little variety in the group that was comprised of Metropolitan Youannes, Hegumen Hananiah El Antony, Hegumen Youhanna Salama, Archdeacon Habib Girgis, the Metropolitan of Sohag, and an empty piece of paper.
6. The Holy Synod did not study the matter of appointing a diocesan metropolitan as Patriarch. For this reason, they fell into a great ecclesiastical error when they used the rite of ordaining the Patriarch from among the monks or hegumens when they ordained Metropolitan Youannes. They laid hands on him twice and ordained him as the Archbishop of Alexandria, which was illegal and non-canonical, since he was already the Metropolitan of El Beheira and Monofia. The Holy Synod did not apply the canon they referenced on July 18, 1928, relating to

the transfer of a bishop to another diocese, to Metropolitan Youannes. It is obvious that the reason for all of these mistakes and errors is the fact that the Church, which was represented by the Holy Synod and Lay Council, was hasty in fulfilling King Fouad's wish in appointing Metropolitan Youannes as Patriarch. They rushed to prevent the election of a Pope who might be sympathetic to the British.

Bishop Youannes was free to refuse, especially since he was the *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark and the Secretary of the Holy Synod, but he accepted the rank of patriarch despite all of the legal and ecclesiastical errors. For this reason, it is no surprise to read the subsequent history in which Pope Youannes sat on the See of St. Mark and blamed himself for his actions. His conscience hurt him because he accepted the rank of Patriarch and broke the Holy Tradition and Canons of the Church. He used to ask the priests to pray for him that he might feel relieved.

After Pope Youannes XIX passed away on June 21, 1942 at the age of 93, after remaining on the See of St. Mark for thirteen years and six months, a discussion concerning the legality of choosing the Patriarch from among the diocesan metropolitans and bishops developed. Five bishops, three of which participated in the ordination of Pope Youannes, wrote a declaration in which they refused to appoint a diocesan metropolitan or bishop as patriarch. Their act shows us that the Holy Synod of 1928 did not resolve the matter in a final manner, because some of the very bishops who participated in that Holy Synod later repudiated the idea of electing a patriarch from among the diocesan metropolitans and bishops. Their act also proves the existence of special circumstances that forced the Holy Synod of 1928 to take its decision, a decision that ultimately led to chaotic incidents from which the Church suffered for thirty years.

2. The Fall of the Mighty:

The life of Pope Macarius III, the 114th Patriarch of Alexandria (1944-45) provides us with a practical lesson concerning the danger of choosing the Patriarch from the diocesan metropolitans and bishops. He was a great man who became a monk at the Monastery of Abba Pishoy at the age of 17. He lived a pious monastic life that helped him gain the trust of Pope Kyrillos V so that the latter chose him as his personal secretary and ordained him as a hegumen on September 1, 1896 when he was only 24. He was later ordained as the Metropolitan of Assiut on July 12, 1897 and provided the Copts in Assiut with an example of holiness and piety. He was a defender of the rites and Holy Canons of the Church as well as a patriotic man who

headed the Coptic Conference at Assiut in 1911 with wisdom after the assassination of Prime Minister Botros Pasha Ghaly. He was also a bright man who mastered the French language. This great man, who lived a fruitful life for 72 years and was honored and respected by all, lost everything when he accepted to be nominated to the See of St. Mark and allied himself with the Coptic Lay Council under El Meniawi Pasha to gain the rank of patriarch. When he became patriarch, he lost everything. First, he clashed with the Coptic Lay Council which had helped him become patriarch. Then, he clashed with the Holy Synod headed by Metropolitan Botros of Akhmim and Sohag on May 22, 1944 when the Holy Synod convened to condemn the actions of Pope Macarius. This meeting established a new precedent in which the Holy Synod could meet without the Patriarch, condemn his actions, and declare their condemnation openly to the public in a general announcement. The tension and strife with the Holy Synod ended when Pope Macarius left the patriarchate for the Monastery of Abba Paula on September 7, 1944 after realizing he could not manage the affairs of the patriarchate. On December 23, 1944, he returned to the patriarchate after Prime Minister Ahmed Maher Pasha intervened, but Pope Macarius remained sorrowful and continued to repent for his action of accepting the rank of patriarch until he departed on August 31, 1945. He remained on the See of St. Mark for only one year, six months, and eighteen days, which were full of struggle, pain and suffering. Pope Macarius could have entered history as one of the great metropolitans of Assiut, but he chose to enter as a patriarch who accomplished nothing but remorse, regret and sadness for breaking the Holy Canons of the Church.

How did this mighty man fall?

After the Thrice-Blessed Pope Youannes XIX passed away on June 21, 1942, the Holy Synod and Coptic Lay Council agreed on choosing Metropolitan Yusab of Girga as the *locum tenens*. The Holy Synod and Coptic Lay Council prepared a regulation chart to organize the nominating and election of the Patriarch. A royal order from King Farouk was issued in 1942 for this purpose. The chart added to the second article a condition that the person nominated to be Patriarch “must be from the monks who were never married. All the conditions stated in the Holy Canons, foundation, and Tradition of the Church must apply to him.”

This article aroused intense discussion and debate about its meaning. Some saw it as prohibiting the nomination of diocesan metropolitans and bishops, because the article mentioned that the candidate must be a monk who was never married, but it did not mention or include diocesan metropolitans and bishops. Others believed that

the phrase “a monk who was never married” included diocesan metropolitans and bishops, because they were chosen from the monks.

Within the Holy Synod, five metropolitans took the position that the article prohibited the election of diocesan metropolitans and bishops. They were Metropolitan Abraam of El Balyana, Metropolitan Botros of Sohag and Akhmim, Metropolitan Athanasius of Beni Suef, Metropolitan Aghapius of Sanabo, Dairout, and Qusqam, who was also the abbot of El Muharraq Monastery, and Metropolitan Sawirous of El Minya and Ushmunain. They issued a declaration in which they announced their refusal to nominate diocesan metropolitans and bishops. The statement was an historical one, for it presented a clear explanation for refusing to nominate the diocesan metropolitans and bishops to the See of St. Mark. I am delighted to attach that statement with this research, but for now, I would like to focus on the following points:

1. Of the five metropolitans who issued that statement, three of them (Metropolitans Abraam, Botros, and Athanasius) participated in the nomination of Pope Youannes XIX whereas the other two (Metropolitans Aghapius and Sawirous) were ordained during the papacy of Pope Youannes.
2. The statement represents a clear decision by some of the metropolitans and fathers to limit the nomination of the Patriarch to monks only. They pointed out in their declaration that many other people held meetings to support this principle. The statement indirectly referred to some metropolitans who opposed the principle, saying, “It is saddening to see the laity more committed to the Holy Canons of the Church than the leaders of the Church who are supposed to protect them, but what can we do to change things?”
3. The statement indicated an important fact concerning the decision of the Holy Synod of 1928, especially since three of the metropolitans signing the statement participated in that Holy Synod. It was the wish of King Fouad that forced them to accept Metropolitan Youannes as a nominee to the See of St. Mark as the statement makes clear: “Ask those fathers (the metropolitans) and their supporters about those who sat on the See of St. Mark. How many of them were diocesan metropolitans? It is a simple calculation. The number of patriarchs reached 113, but none of them was a diocesan metropolitan except His Holiness Pope Youannes XIX, who obtained that rank only by coercion against the will of the Church. Did these people want to create a canon for themselves out of an exception?”

4. The five metropolitans noted a suggestion that was presented to the Holy Synod, saying, “How wonderful was that suggestion presented by one of the honored fathers during the last meeting asking the metropolitans who nominated themselves to withdraw their names to protect the unity of the Church.”

That same suggestion was presented by one of the bishops to the Holy Synod in 2012. It seems that the suggestion, which was presented in 2012, met the same fate of the identical suggestion presented in 1942.

5. The five metropolitans ended their statement, saying:

We have a final word for the supporters of those metropolitans. What was the advantage that those metropolitans had over the monks? When that question was asked, the answer was “experience, knowledge and training.” This answer was quite saddening, something that hurt the soul and scared the spirit, for what was the source of this experience, knowledge and training? If it was a worldly source, it was not a true experience; it was fake knowledge and useless training. For as the Apostle said, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor. 1:20). Our Lord chose His disciples from simple people, for He said that everyone was to be taught by God. As for the source of their experience, knowledge and training, it was the Holy Spirit. Let the Spirit work in others as it worked in them, unless they deny the work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord promised that He will be with us all the days and until the end of the days.

By Christian love, we wish to ask those who are interested this matter never to choose a patriarch except from among the monks and to never support any other candidate, especially after the effectiveness and readiness of those monks was proved to the members of the Coptic Lay Council.

As for the Lay Council, it was divided into two groups, one led by Habib Pasha El Masry, the Secretary of the Council, which desired that the Patriarch be chosen from among the monks, and another group led by El Meniawi Pasha, which supported the choice of Metropolitan Macarius of Assiut.

It was decided that the election of the Patriarch to succeed Pope Youannes XIX would be held on Friday, February 4, 1944. The candidates included four metropolitans (Metropolitan Macarius of Assiut, Metropolitan Yusab of Girga, who was also the *locum tenens*, Metropolitan Theophilus of Jerusalem, and Metropolitan Abraam of Giza) and two monks (Hegumen Athanasius El Muharraqi and Hegumen Francis El Baramousi). Metropolitan Macarius won with a great majority and was ordained as Pope Macarius III on Sunday, February 13, 1944 at the age of 72.

The Copts received the appointment of Pope Macarius III with joy, because he had a good reputation among the people. At the next session of the Coptic Lay

Council, which was held on Tuesday, February 15, 1944, everyone congratulated Pope Macarius. Habib El Masry, the Secretary of the Council who supported nominating monks only, delivered a speech congratulating the new Pope and expressing hope for his care. It is worthwhile to mention the good relationship between Pope Macarius and Habib El Masry that lasted for many years. Prior to his election, Metropolitan Macarius used to call and visit Habib El Masry every time he visited Cairo and the latter would do the same every time he visited Assiut. Iris Habib El Masry said of them, "Metropolitan Macarius had a special place in my father's heart for he grew up in his care since childhood." There was a great love for that bishop that was transmitted afterwards to his family. She also mentioned a story that occurred during the nomination process while Metropolitan Macarius was nominated and Habib El Masry was opposing that nomination. Metropolitan Macarius visited Habib El Masry's home and said, "You are my son since childhood, and yet, when I was nominated, you supported the others?!" Habib El Masry responded, "You know, my honored father, the extent of my love and honor for you, but my loyalty to the Church is more than my loyalty to anyone, even you. And if the ecclesiastical Canons permitted electing diocesan metropolitans, I would have been the first one to vote for you." Metropolitan Macarius responded, "But the people want me." Habib El Masry replied, "You are the leader of the people, their guide and their teacher. I was expecting that Your Eminence, when the people asked you to nominate yourself, you would have answered, 'No, my children, I already received dignity from the Lord of the Church. The monk is the one who has the right in this dignity you want to grant me, so I advise you to elect so and so.'" Ms. El Masry concluded the story by saying, "Those words led to the enmity between the honorable metropolitan and his spiritual son."

The tumultuous incidents occurred one after another after Pope Macarius' ordination. In the Coptic Lay Council, El Meniawi Pasha forced Habib El Masry to resign, because he had opposed Pope Macarius' ordination. The resignation was accepted by the Pope and El Meniawi replaced him.

In addition, the properties owned by the patriarchate and monasteries were a complicated problem between the metropolitans and the Coptic Lay Council since its establishment in 1883. The members of the Council saw that it was their right to manage the properties of the Church, but the metropolitans refused to deliver the properties to them. As Metropolitan of Assiut, Abba Macarius supported the Council, and in one particular incident, convinced Bishop Theophilus of Manfalout to cede properties to the Council in 1920 and 1926. When he was ordained as Patriarch, Pope Macarius received a request from El Meniawi to deliver certain

properties to the Council. Without conferring with the Holy Synod, he agreed and issued an order on February 22, 1944 establishing a special department to manage the properties of the monasteries under the supervision of the Council. Its task was “to count immediately the properties owned by the monasteries and revise the accounts with the existing trustees. Any appointment or dismissal of the trustees must be done through us according to your suggestions.” This order angered the members of the Holy Synod and led them to convene a meeting. Pope Macarius refused to attend the meeting, so the fathers met under the leadership of Metropolitan Botros of Sohag and issued a public announcement clarifying the role of the Holy Synod and the mistakes of Pope Macarius in delivering the properties of the Church to the Lay Council.

El Meniawi and the entire Lay Council clashed with Pope Macarius concerning the Theological School, because the Pope hesitated to deliver its properties, especially after the announcement issued by the Holy Synod. The problem between them reached such a point that the Lay Council sued Pope Macarius and he was denounced in open court.

Pope Macarius thus found himself in a difficult situation between the Holy Synod and the Lay Council. He was incapable of managing the affairs of the Church, so he left to the Monastery of Abba Paula in September 1944 and remained there until December 1944. He returned to the patriarchate only after Prime Minister Ahmed Maher Pasha intervened.

Afterwards, Pope Macarius spent his days blaming himself for accepting the rank of patriarch and sorrowful for his inability to achieve reform. His sadness ended only when he departed on August 31, 1945 after remaining on the See of St. Mark for only one year, one month, and eighteen days, which were filled with struggle and agony. Notably, as Pope, he did not ordain a single bishop.

3. The Fall to the Bottom

At the beginning of the renaissance in Egypt led by Mohammed Ali, the See of St. Mark grew in prominence because of the patriarchs God had placed on it. The growth began with the papacy of Pope Markos VIII, the 108th Patriarch (1796-1809), which witnessed the French campaign in Egypt and the beginning of Mohammed Ali's rule. Later came Pope Botros El Gawly, the 109th Patriarch (1810-1852) who took exceptional care of his people and was a patriot who stood against foreign protection as can be seen in his meeting with the Consul of Russia. After Pope Peter came Pope Kyrillos IV, the 110th Patriarch (1813-1870) who

deserved his title “Father of Reform.” He was succeeded by Pope Demetrius II, the 111th Patriarch (1862-1870). All of these patriarchs were pious monks in whom God’s grace worked to bring forth fruits of spiritual work. After Pope Demetrius II departed, some tried to change the Holy Tradition of the Church and nominate Metropolitan Morkos, the Metropolitan of El Beheira and the *locum tenens* at the time, as the new patriarch for reasons that were outlined above. Metropolitan Basilios of Jerusalem opposed that trend and the Holy Synod of 1873 acted to protect the Tradition. The fruit of their work was the choice of Pope Kyrillos V, the 112th Patriarch (1804-1927) to whom God granted a long life to remain on the See of St. Mark for 52 years while achieving a great renaissance. He became a mark in the history of the patriarchs of the See of St. Mark.

The year 1928 brought a change in the Church that led to the gradual fall to the bottom. We witnessed how the Holy Synod and the Coptic Lay Council both yielded to King Fouad’s wish and appointed Metropolitan Youannes of El Beheira as Pope Youannes XIX. We then saw the incidents that accompanied the appointment of Pope Macarius III, that great personality and respectable metropolitan, and how his appointment changed his life in misery and agony as he blamed himself and remained on the See of St. Mark for a very short time. Despite all of these unfortunate incidents that interfered with the renaissance of the Church and the prestige of the See of St. Mark, one cannot deny that the character of Pope Youannes XIX and Pope Macarius III helped slow down the fall. Their character did not stop the fall completely, but rather, only slowed it down. We reached the peak of that fall during the papacy of Pope Macarius who was opposed by the Holy Synod, which convened without him and openly denounced his actions. As noted above, he was also opposed by the Lay Council led by El Meniawi, which sued him in an open court.

After the departure of Pope Macarius III, the unfortunate incidents increased and the fall accelerated until we reached the absolute bottom. When I mention these incidents, I do not intend to judge anyone, for God alone is the One Who judges and the Church teaches us to respect and honor our fathers no matter what they did. But we are evaluating incidents here to benefit from them, for history is a school from which we learn. As for those incidents, they did not impact the holiness of the Church, for we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. However, we do not believe in the infallibility of men, irrespective of who they are. The holiness of the Church is derived from the holiness of Her Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ. We examine these incidents trusting that God will protect His Church.

After Pope Macarius III departed on August 31, 1945, the Holy Synod and Coptic Lay Council held a meeting on the evening September 3, 1945 under the leadership of Metropolitan Yusab of Girga. They chose Metropolitan Athanasius of Beni Suef and Bahnasa as the *locum tenens* of the See of St. Mark.

Metropolitan Yusab was nominated for the See of St. Mark supported by El Meniawi, the Secretary of the Coptic Lay Council, and Hegumen Ibrahim Luka. All those who favored nominating only a monk for the See of St. Mark nominated Hegumen Dawood El Maqari. The historian Iris Habib El Masry mentioned that El Meniawi plotted to ensure Metropolitan Yusab would win the election by any means. At this time, any election ballots that would be returned because of the death of their holder or a change of address would be sent to the Lay Council. Because he was the Secretary of the Lay Council, El Meniawi used his power to distribute these ballots to people who did not have the right to vote according to rules of the Church. Instead, they were all followers of El Meniawi and supporters of Metropolitan Yusab. Ms. El Masry continued, "A hundred and eighty voting ballots were returned and distributed through this plot." Later, El Meniawi and his supporters did not hesitate in admitting this when they had a conflict with the newly elected Pope Yusab. Also, the day of the election saw a general strike of all transportation workers. Hegumen Ibrahim Luka asked his close friend, Army Captain Basily Sedky, to bring buses to transport only the supporters of Metropolitan Yusab in light of the transportation strike, and he did so. The election was held and Metropolitan Yusab won with a great majority of 180 votes. He was ordained as Pope Yusab II on May 26, 1946 at St. Mark Church in El Azbakia.

After Pope Yusab II was appointed as patriarch of the See of St. Mark, he appointed Hegumen Ibrahim Luka as the General Secretary of the patriarchate. Soon thereafter, El Meniawi asked Pope Yusab II to deliver the church properties to the Coptic Lay Council, but the Pope refused. El Meniawi sued the Pope several times in civil courts, but lost each time. When he did not know what else to do, he decided to withdraw all of the Church's money and to deposit it in his own personal account. He was then sued by the patriarchate, which won the case. The struggle between Pope Yusab and the Lay Council continued for a long time; the friends of yesterday became the enemies of today.

The great tragedy of Pope Yusab's papacy, however, was the Pope's servant Melek (Kamel Gergis). This man began to serve Pope Yusab while he was the Metropolitan of Girga. When Pope Yusab was elected patriarch, he brought Melek with him to Cairo. Melek had a great influence on the Pope who trusted him unconditionally. He

was able to control the Pope's decisions and began interfering in the affairs of the patriarchate. Melek even interfered in important matters such as the ordination of bishops and priests. He demanded that a certain amount be paid to him (Melek) on every ordination. These actions of Melek led to a great disturbance in the affairs of the patriarchate and chaos. Melek became the real patriarch, because the Pope submitted to him completely. The people drifted away from the Pope and were discontented.

Numerous complaints reached Egyptian government officials until the Interior Ministry issued an order to arrest Melek during the visit of Pope Yusab II to Alexandria on August 29, 1953. He was arrested and sent back to Girga. The revolutionary government considered this action to be a cleansing similar to what was done elsewhere in Egypt.

Pope Yusab was angered at this action, because he trusted Melek completely and considered Melek's arrest as an affront to his own personal freedom and an interference in his own affairs. He began asking the authorities for Melek's release and spent a great deal of time working towards that goal. We heard a story that when President Mohammed Naguib, the first president of the Republic of Egypt, visited Pope Yusab II and asked him what he wanted for the Copts, the Pope's first request was the release of Melek, which was fulfilled. Melek returned to Cairo, but was forbidden to go to the patriarchate. However, he was always in contact with the Pope and continued to influence him as the people's anger grew.

The situation became much worse when something unprecedented in the history of the Church occurred. A number of people calling themselves "The Group of the Coptic Nation" went to the patriarchate on July 25, 1954 and forced the Pope at gunpoint to sign a document that stated he was stepping down as Pope. They placed him in a car and took him to the Monastery of Mar Gergis in Old Cairo. They later returned to the patriarchate and rioted there for several days demanding reform before they were arrested by the police. The Patriarch was later returned to the patriarchate.

These unfortunate incidents did not prevent Pope Yusab from falling under the influence of his servant Melek one more time. This time, the situation deteriorated from bad to worse. In 1955, Melek suggested to Pope Yusab to dismiss the bishops of the monasteries and appoint new ones to benefit financially from the new appointments. On August 14, 1955, Pope Yusab issued an order to dismiss Bishop Ghobrial of the Monastery of Abba Antony on the Red Sea. Bishop Ghobrial sought the help of the Holy Synod, which met on September 5, 1955 and decided to dismiss

Pope Yusab II with consensus from the Coptic Lay Council. The government approved this decision because the people were disenchanted by the Patriarch. On September 22, 1955, the government issued an order to dismiss Pope Yusab II as the Patriarch. Notably, the government used this opportunity to eliminate the ecclesiastical courts, a move that the Church opposed.

Pope Yusab left the patriarchate to El Muharraq Monastery on September 27, 1955. The Holy Synod met and elected three metropolitans to manage the affairs of the Church, Metropolitan Aghapius of Dairout, Metropolitan Mikhail of Assiut, and Metropolitan Benjamin of Monofia.

The Patriarch returned to Cairo while feeling ill. He could not go to the patriarchate so he went to the Coptic Hospital where he remained until his departure at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, November 13 1956. His body was sent to the patriarchate and displayed on the See of St. Mark before his funeral on November 14, 1956.

As for his servant Melek, who was the reason for all of Pope Yusab's troubles, he lost all his money and lived his last days in poverty while begging in the streets of El Azbakia until he died on May 15, 1973.

CONCLUSION

Between the Year 1928 and the Year 2012

In 1928, we chose to ignore the Holy Tradition of the Church in choosing the Patriarch and fell to the bottom. In 1959, we chose to preserve the Tradition and chose Hegumen Mina the Solitary as Pope Kyrillos VI, the 116th Patriarch, and began our ascent upwards. The Church witnessed a great spiritual renaissance during the papacies of two of the greatest patriarchs, Pope Kyrillos VI and Pope Shenouda III.

Today, after the departure of the Thrice-Blessed Pope Shenouda III, the controversy has returned as it has whenever the See of St. Mark became vacant from the time of Pope Demetrius II until now. In 1873, the Church, led by Metropolitan Basilos of Jerusalem and the Holy Synod chose to preserve the Tradition. In response, God granted the Church Pope Kyrillos V. In the years 1928, 1944, and 1946, the Church chose to abandon the Tradition and had a different experience as mentioned above. In 1959, the Church corrected the error, and in response, God gave Her Pope Kyrillos VI and Pope Shenouda III.

Now we are at a crossroads. What do we choose? Do we want a patriarch who we remember because of a person like Melek or a patriarch who we remember for ushering in the miraculous apparitions of the Holy Theotokos St. Mary?

I want to enrich the discussion about the right choice and to learn some lessons from the incidents mentioned in this research.

1.

The idea of choosing the Patriarch from the diocesan metropolitans and bishops began when the prestige of the See of St. Mark increased and the rational thinking led people to consider outwardly qualifications with more importance. However, that kind of thinking is not from God, because the priesthood requires, above all, grace from God. If the priest or bishop needs special help from God to perform his duties, what about the Patriarch who carries great responsibilities? God grants his grace to the honest and humble hearts who do not seek dignity and do not struggle to reach the See of St. Mark. The five metropolitans who issued the statement in 1942 requesting to limit the election of the Patriarch to monks asked,

What was the advantage that those metropolitans had over the monks? When that question was asked, the answer was “experience, knowledge and training.” This answer was quite saddening, something that hurt the soul and scared the spirit, for what was the source of this experience, knowledge and training? If it was a worldly source, it was not a true experience; it was fake knowledge and useless training. For as the Apostle said, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor. 1:20). Our Lord chose His disciples from simple people, for He said that everyone was to be taught by God. As for the source of their experience, knowledge and training, it was the Holy Spirit. Let the Spirit work in others as it worked in them, unless they deny the work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord promised that He will be with us all the days and until the end of the days.

The Church refused this principle and chose Pope Macarius III because he was experienced and honored as the Metropolitan of Assiut for more than 40 years. He had bright thoughts, an excellent reform plan, and many skills. However, when he was chosen as patriarch, he became embroiled in many struggles with the Coptic Lay Council and the Holy Synod. It all ended with him leaving the patriarchate for the Monastery of Abba Paula. Later, he returned, but spent his days in agony blaming himself until he died. His papacy was short, full of agony, and unfulfilled, because he never accomplished what the people expected of him.

When the Church chose Hegumen Mina the Solitary, however, his reform program was prayer and fasting. As a result, the Church witnessed a great renaissance and the work of God was evident in the Church.

God Who chose David the youngest of his brothers and made him one of the greatest kings of Israel is capable of choosing the pure vessel to pour out His blessings upon His Church and people.

Strangely, the three patriarchs who were diocesan metropolitans were quite successful and accomplished many things as metropolitans. For this reason, they were chosen as patriarchs, but as patriarchs, they accomplished nothing.

2.

The See of St. Mark has great rank and prestige, which might tempt some to strongly desire it and fall. History teaches us that those metropolitans who desired the dignity of the See of St. Mark not only did not get it, but also lost their own dignity, as well. Where was the dignity of Pope Yusab II who was a metropolitan honored in Girga, Ethiopia, Jerusalem, and among other churches? When this honored metropolitan became patriarch, he was attacked by the Lay Council and even the people who supported his wish to become patriarch. These same people brought lawsuits against him in civil courts. When he allowed himself to be influenced by his servant Melek, he became a reason for discontent and anger among the people. It all ended by his disgraceful kidnapping, which not even a priest in a small village ever experienced. He was later dismissed by the Holy Synod and had no place to go until he went to the Coptic Hospital and died. Where was the honor that he gained? Truly the one who seeks dignity sees it escape from him.

Some might say that they were forced to accept the See of St. Mark for the benefit of the people. History taught us that those who accepted breaking the Holy Canons of the Church to benefit the people actually never benefited the people. On the contrary, they harmed the people. How did the people benefit from Melek controlling Pope Yusab? How did the people benefit from the confusion of Pope Macarius III between the Holy Synod and the Lay Council? The people benefited from Abba Yusab as the Metropolitan of Girga and from Abba Macarius as the Metropolitan of Assiut. But they did not benefit from them as patriarchs. Some might say that they accepted the See of St. Mark to appease the people. History teaches us that they were fooling themselves with that excuse. As a result, they earned the people's discontent and anger. Where were the people who chose Pope Yusab? We have to make a comparison between the popularity of Pope Yusab II and the popularity of Pope Kyrillos VI to understand the difference between fake and true popularity.

3.

The metropolitans who sought the See of St. Mark also sought the help of the authorities to achieve their goals. Bishop Isaac sought the help of Abullah who killed two bishops that opposed Bishop Isaac and threatened Pope Mikhail I of Alexandria. The wish of King Fouad was the reason Pope Youannes XIX was enthroned. Five courageous metropolitans admitted that in their 1942 statement, saying, “Abba Youannes took the See of St. Mark for compelling reasons outside the will of the Church.” Pope Macarius depended on the support of El Meniawi as part of an agreement that he would surrender the church properties to the Lay Council. As for Pope Yusab, his election was filled with illegal actions that no true conscience could accept.

For these reasons, we see that the Fathers of the Church prohibited the election of diocesan metropolitans and bishops to the See of St. Mark. They also prevented seeking help from the authorities to gain the priesthood. Support for this found in the decision of the Holy Synod headed by Pope Mikhail I in the eighth century and the decision of the Holy Synod of 1873.

I am putting this humble research in front of you all while asking our Lord to grant us a righteous shepherd who will guide His people with purity and righteousness. We strongly believe that the Church is in the hands of God Who has protected the See of St. Mark and will protect it until His Second Coming.